

## **50 Free Things to do in Howard County**

By Amanda Hof

The best things in life are free, but one might think that's not true in Howard County, an affluent bedroom community of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Md., ranked as the third richest county in the nation (according to the 2006 U.S. Census) with an average household income of more than \$100,000, and a perennial on Money magazine's "Top Ten Best Places to Live in America."

While Howard County offers a healthy share of upscale amenities and experiences to fit the richest of lifestyles, it also has countless activities, events and attractions that are absolutely free. Even those not trying to pinch a penny, will want to take part in these 50, sure-to-please, FREE ways to explore the wonders of Howard County.

### **Day Trips**

#### **Bob's Vintage Museum at Bob's BMW Motorcycles**

Bob's Vintage Museum in Jessup features a one-of-a-kind exhibit of 30 vintage motorcycles, ultra rare accessories and side car exhibits, original posters and literature, a gift shop, snack shop and free coffee. For hours of operation or additional information, visit [www.bobsbmw.com](http://www.bobsbmw.com) or call 301-497-8949.

#### **Days End Farm Horse Rescue**

Days End Farm Horse Rescue in Woodbine offers daily tours from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Visitors can meet horses and see before-and-after pictures of successful rehabilitations, stop in the souvenir and tack shops, and gather information about programs. No appointment is necessary for individual tours but call ahead to schedule groups. Parking is free; donations are appreciated but not required. Volunteer opportunities are also available. For more information, visit [www.defhr.org/sponsr/2008biz.htm](http://www.defhr.org/sponsr/2008biz.htm) or call 301-854-5037 or 410-442-1564.

#### **The Howard County Conservancy**

Headquartered at the 300-year-old Mt. Pleasant Farm in Woodstock, the Conservancy offers dozens of year-round educational programs for adults and children, including the popular Second Saturday Nature Walks. Numerous volunteer opportunities are also available. For hours of operation and additional information, visit [www.hcconservancy.org](http://www.hcconservancy.org) or call 410-465-8877.

#### **Howard County Wildlife Driving Tour**

Pick up a free copy of this handy pocket guide to Howard County's wildlife. This colorful guide features an itinerary, map, species checklists, optimal viewing times and more. To pick up or request a copy, visit or contact the Howard County Tourism Council at [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com) or 410-313-1900.

### **Grist Mill Trail Extension**

The new Grist Mill Trail Extension is a multi-use trail featuring a pedestrian bridge over the Patapsco River and the remains of the 1829 Patterson Viaduct. Parking is free on Ilchester Road in Ellicott City or, for a small fee, park at the Orange Grove area of Patapsco Valley State Park. To pick up an informational brochure or request additional information, contact Howard County Tourism Council at [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com) or 410-313-1900.

### **Spirituality & Healing**

#### **Centennial Peace Garden At Bon Secours Spiritual Center**

Located in Marriottsville, the gate of this garden serves the same purpose as the great doorways in medieval cathedrals - it marks the transition from the everyday world to a place of peace and harmony. Immediately inside the gate there is a dry landscape garden with benches. The small wooded slope on the right is enhanced with a series of boulders, spaced to form natural rooms, which also may be used as seating. Open daily from dawn till dusk. For additional information, visit [www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org](http://www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org) or call 410-442-1320.

#### **Labyrinth at Bon Secours Spiritual Center**

Unlike a maze, the labyrinth at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville has only one path which leads to the center and out again. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. Walk it with an open mind and an open heart. Open daily from dawn till dusk. For additional information, visit [www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org](http://www.bonsecoursspiritualcenter.org) or call 410-442-1320.

### **Kids**

#### **Clark's Elloak Farm**

Treasures wait in Ellicott City at this fun petting farm, home to many authentic figures rescued from the Enchanted Forest. While modest admission and activities fees apply infants 12 months and under can enjoy free hayrides. For hours of operation, prices or additional information, visit [www.clarklandfarm.com](http://www.clarklandfarm.com) or call 410-730-4049.

#### **Family Fun Day at the Mall in Columbia**

Enjoy a morning of lively children's entertainment at The Mall in Columbia. Kids can sing, dance and laugh with popular entertainers like Kidsinger Jim, Mayhem Magical Circus and Pam the Kindersinger. It happens every Thursday from 10 - 11 a.m. in the Lord & Taylor lower court. For a schedule or additional information, visit [www.themallincolumbia.com/Events](http://www.themallincolumbia.com/Events) or call 410-730-3300.

### **Free Lesson at the Columbia Horse Center**

Wondering if horseback riding is right for your child - or you? Try it out with a free lesson at the Columbia Horse Center in Laurel. Offered every Saturday at 1 p.m., the lesson includes basic safety instruction and technique and gives riders a half-hour of riding time. Minimum age is 5 years old; call ahead at 301-776-5850 to schedule. For additional information, visit [www.columbiahorsecenter.com](http://www.columbiahorsecenter.com).

### **Project Clean Stream with Friends of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Greenway**

Get involved and help clean up local streams. Friends of the Patapsco Valley Heritage Greenway (FPVHG) have taken the lead in coordinating, planning and conducting simultaneous cleanups within the Patapsco watershed in cooperation with Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. The event usually takes place on the first Saturday in April at various locations throughout Howard County. For additional information, visit [www.patapscoheritagegreenway.org/index.html](http://www.patapscoheritagegreenway.org/index.html) or call 410-480-0824.

### **History & Heritage**

#### **Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum**

While not technically in Howard County (it's just over the Baltimore County line in Oella), the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum is home to an impressive collection of artifacts and exhibits dedicated to the life and times of "the first African-American man of science" and has excellent birding trails and a garden as well. For hours of operation or additional information, call 410-887-1081.

#### **Bollman Truss Bridge**

Located in Savage, The Bollman Truss Bridge is the only known remaining example of the revolutionary all-iron truss system patented by Baltimore engineer Wendell Bollman in the mid-19th century. Constructed in 1869, the bridge was moved to its current site in 1888 and was in use until 1915. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000, it is now utilized as a pedestrian bridge connecting Historic Savage Mill with the Mill Trail, an enjoyable walk that links old mill sites along the Patuxent River. For additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap\\_heritage.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap_heritage.htm) or call 410-313-4700.

#### **The Columbia Archives**

Located in Columbia's Town Center, The Columbia Archives boast a one-of-a-kind collection of documents on the history and culture of the planned new town, Columbia, and the life of Jim Rouse, its founder. The archives are open to the casual visitor as well as those who are interested in doing in-depth research. The staff is happy to pull photographs, videos, builders' brochures, articles and books, etc. For hours of operation or additional information, e-mail the archives staff at [Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com](mailto:Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com) or call 410-715-3103.

### **Ellicott City Firehouse Museum**

Located in the county's first firehouse at the intersection of Main Street and Church Road in Historic Ellicott City, the Firehouse Museum houses a wide array of fire apparatus, model toys, and an impressive visual history of Howard County's Volunteer Fire Department. The firehouse was constructed by volunteers in 1889 and after 1923 was used as a meeting hall, county office space and library reading room before opening as a museum. Open Saturday, Sunday and Monday; also available by appointment. For hours of operation or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap\\_heritage.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap_heritage.htm) or call 410-465-8500.

### **Heritage Orientation Center**

Located behind the Thomas Isaac Log Cabin at the intersection of Main Street and Ellicott Mills Drive in Historic Ellicott City, The Heritage Orientation Center was the county's first Court Records building and is now home to a unique collection of exhibits on 18th and 19th century milling techniques, the floods of Ellicott Mills and the Ellicott family. For hours of operation or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap\\_heritage.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap_heritage.htm) or call 410-465-8500.

### **Howard County Historical Society Museum & Library**

Located in Ellicott City's Historic District, the society offers exhibits and educational programs on the history of Howard County and Maryland and provides library research. Free organ concerts are also offered several times a year. For hours of operation or more information, visit [www.hchsmd.org](http://www.hchsmd.org) or call 410-750-0370.

### **Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park Visitor Center**

Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park (PFI) and Visitor Center is located in Historic Ellicott City. It originally was founded in 1837 and operated for more than 50 years as an elegant finishing school for young women. Visitors can see the remarkable remains of the institute and view artifacts while learning about women of the Victorian era. For hours of operation or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap\\_heritage.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap_heritage.htm) or call 410-465-8500.

### **Thomas Isaac Log Cabin**

Located at the intersection of Main Street and Ellicott Mills Drive in Historic Ellicott City, the Thomas Isaac Log Cabin is named after its late 19th century owner. This rustic structure was built circa 1780 as a settler's home in Ellicott Mills. Visitors can learn about the settlement and development of the region from authentically costumed historians and artisans. For hours of operation or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap\\_heritage.htm](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/rap_heritage.htm) or call 410-465-8500.

## **55 And Better**

### **50+EXPO**

This not-to-be-missed annual event that takes place each October at Wild Lake High School in Columbia is presented by the Howard County Office on Aging, features fun activities and includes more than 140 exhibitors. Free parking is located at The Mall in Columbia with shuttle service to and from the main entrance of the event. For a listing programs and exhibitors, visit [www.co.ho.md.us/OA/aging\\_seniorctr.htm](http://www.co.ho.md.us/OA/aging_seniorctr.htm) or call 410-313-6410.

### **Free Wii**

This 55 and older Wii club, facilitated by Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks, offers the first game free. The club meets on Tuesdays from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Bain Center in Columbia. For additional information, call 410-313-6410 or visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/).

## **For Mom & Dad**

### **Spa, Pool & Patio Show**

Go just for fun or get serious about planning your own backyard paradise. This annual event, held every June at the Howard County Fairgrounds, brings all the latest spa and patio offerings to one convenient location. Parking and admission are free. For additional information, visit [www.spasarefun.com](http://www.spasarefun.com).

### **Wine & Microbrew Tastings**

Sample fine wines and microbrews from various regions while chatting with the experts at these and many more retailers: Decanter Fine Wines (410-531-6663, 6420 Freetown Road #170, Columbia); Columbia Liquors (410-997-8151, 10400 Shaker Drive, Columbia); i.m. Wine (240-456-0330, 8180 Maple Lawn Boulevard, Fulton); and Enchanted Forest Wine & Spirits (10010 Baltimore National Pike, Ellicott City). Many locations also offer free newsletters.

## **Programs**

### **Howard County Public Library**

Howard County Library ranks first in the nation among great public libraries, according to Hennen's American Public Library Ratings 2005. The library system offers a wide variety of free activities, classes, seminars and workshops for all age groups. Library users also can choose from thousands of books and free computer and Internet access. Six locations throughout the county are situated near parks or scenic open space and have plenty of free parking. For locations, hours of operation, program listings or additional information, visit [www.hclibrary.org](http://www.hclibrary.org) or call 410-313-7890.

### **What's In a Name: The Origin of Place Names in Columbia**

This intriguing lecture sheds light on and examines the origin of Columbia's unusual street and place names. "What's In A Name" is hosted by Columbia Archives and occurs every few months. For dates and location or additional information, e-mail the Archives at [Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com](mailto:Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com) or call 410-715-3103.

### **Art & Culture**

#### **Columbia Art Center**

Located in the Long Reach Village Center, Columbia Art Center Gallery exhibitions and artist receptions are always free and open to the public. The Art Center also offers a lineup of free lectures and programs. For hours of operation, exhibit information, program listings or additional information, visit [www.columbiaartcenter.org](http://www.columbiaartcenter.org) or call 410-730-0075.

#### **Columbia Festival of the Arts LakeFest Weekend**

This signature event has taken place on Columbia's Lakefront for more than 20 years. Columbia Festival of the Arts presents a host of top-flight artists and performers for two weeks every June. While many of the events require tickets, the opening LakeFest weekend is a free event featuring popular live bands, artists and vendors, a sidewalk chalk drawing contest, and the ever-popular cardboard Boat Float. For additional information, visit [www.columbiafestival.org](http://www.columbiafestival.org) or call 410-715-3044.

#### **Howard County Center for the Arts**

The Howard County Center for the Arts in Ellicott City is a multi-purpose community arts facility that features two professional galleries, an intimate black box theater, classrooms, a dance studio and individual artists' studios. While programs have some fees, the center is open to the public and features several free annual gallery exhibits. Changing exhibits showcase the work of local, regional and national artists - emerging and established - working in all media. For hours of operation, exhibit information and additional information, visit [www.hocoarts.org](http://www.hocoarts.org) or call 410-313-2787.

#### **The Rouse Company Foundation Art Gallery**

This gallery, located in the lobby of the Peter and Elizabeth Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center at Howard Community College in Columbia, is devoted to bringing a diverse range of quality exhibits to Howard County. Visit [www.howardcc.edu](http://www.howardcc.edu) for hours and current exhibit information.

## **Pets**

### **A Dog's Day in Ellicott City**

This pet friendly event in Historic Ellicott City is usually held on a Sunday in early June. Fun for the entire family includes a pet parade, contests, pet adoptions, sidewalk sales, arts and crafts activities and more. There are prizes to be won. For additional information, visit The Yuppy Puppy Pet Boutique, LLC, at [www.theyuppypuppypetboutique.com](http://www.theyuppypuppypetboutique.com) or call 410-750-9663.

### **Dog Day Afternoon**

Columbia residents and their four-legged friends are invited to an afternoon of games, treats and entertaining activities. Area pet vendors will be on hand to supply information on keeping your pets healthy and happy. The event is scheduled for April 18, 2009; location is to be determined. For additional information, visit [www.columbiaassociation.com](http://www.columbiaassociation.com) or call 410-715-3171.

### **Oriole Dog Training Club, No Speed Limit Flyball Tournament**

Flyball is the fastest and loudest of dog sports - a lightening fast relay race for dogs. This event is much cheaper than a baseball game; admission and parking are free. It happens annually in October at the Howard County Fairgrounds in West Friendship, 410-468-1361, [www.howardcountyfair.org](http://www.howardcountyfair.org).

### **Schooley Mill Horse Park**

Bring your horse - this 192-acre park in Highland features an equestrian ring and riding trails. If you don't have a horse, that's OK; additional amenities include playing fields, picnic tables and pavilions, grills, historical interpretation and a state-of-the-art playground. The park is open 7 a.m. to dusk. For additional information, visit, [www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/) or call 410-313-4700.

### **Shrine of St. Anthony, Blessing of the Animals**

Pet owners can give thanks and ask God's blessing upon their pets. All pets need to be on a leash. Blessing takes place in October in the piazza before the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City. For additional information, visit [www.shrineofstanthony.org](http://www.shrineofstanthony.org) or call 410-531-2800.

## **Special Events, Annual Events & Festivals**

### **Antique Car, Truck & Cycle Show Flea Market**

This event is hosted by Chesapeake Region Antique Automobile Club of America; parking and admission are free. It takes place annually each March, indoors and outdoors, rain or shine, at the Howard County Fairgrounds in West Friendship. For additional information, visit [www.howardcountyfair.org](http://www.howardcountyfair.org).

**Cherry Blossoms Annual Display of Pink**

Catch a spectacular display of pink each spring during the last two weeks of April, when over 1250 Kwanzan cherry trees blossom through out Howard County. Take a camera and picnic basket and visit any of eighteen different groves of Blossoms of Hope: The Howard County Cherry Tree Project cherry trees. Groves range in size from five to 26 trees and are located at county libraries, local parks and historic attractions. Enjoy the trees while driving too, over 300 Blossoms of Hope Trees are planted along State and County roadways. Visit [www.blossomsofhope.com](http://www.blossomsofhope.com) to learn more.

**Columbia Bike About**

Each year this event features a new route of about 15 miles, designed to acquaint cyclists with Columbia's historical, artistic and environmental places of interest and the connectivity of the extensive path system. The ride is self-paced on well-marked trails and streets. BikeAbout is scheduled for May 2, 2009, and begins and ends at Lake Elkhorn in Columbia; pre-registration is encouraged. For additional information, e-mail the Columbia Archives at [columbia.archives@columbiaassociation.com](mailto:columbia.archives@columbiaassociation.com).

**Courtyard Concert Series**

Columbia Village Centers offer more than shopping. Catch great outdoor concerts and various other acts of entertainment at the Dorsey's Search, Hickory Ridge, River Hill, Harper's Choice, Kings Contrivance and Wilde Lake village centers. Days and hours vary; the events occur mid-June through mid-August. For a complete schedule or additional information, visit [www.columbiavillagecenters.com](http://www.columbiavillagecenters.com) or call 443-367-5123.

**Daffodil Days at Whipps Cemetery Gardens**

Whipps Cemetery Gardens, located off the southeast corner of Frederick Road and St. Johns Lane in Ellicott City, is open year round. Daffodil Days is an annual event held in either late March or early April. The event features blooming daffodils throughout the gardens, talks on the history and horticulture, and complimentary refreshments. For more information, call 410-465-6721.

**Ellicott City Fall Festival**

Enjoy a day in 236-year-old downtown Ellicott City. This family friendly event happens annually the last Saturday in September and features entertainment, kids' activities and community displays. For additional information, contact the Ellicott City Business Association at 410-461-9336.



**Ellicott City Restoration Foundation Photo Contest Exhibit**

Get an artist's perspective of Historical Ellicott City at Ellicott City Restoration Foundation's annual Photo Contest Exhibit and Reception. All photos are taken within the Ellicott City Historic District and remain on exhibit for two months. The reception takes place annually on the first Friday in June at the Howard County Historical Society in Ellicott City. There is no entry fee and cash prizes are awarded. For additional information, call 410-247-9252.

**Game Club at Historic Savage Mill**

Located in Savage, The Family Game Store at Historic Savage Mill sponsors free game clubs Friday or Saturday nights at 6 p.m., or Sunday afternoon at noon. These special events are often held to introduce new games. For event schedules or for more information, call 301-776-5980.

**Lakefront Summer Festival**

The festival provides outdoor entertainment every night of the week, mid-June through mid-August. Bring a blanket or a lawn chair and enjoy live performances or movies held on the lawn at the Columbia Town Center Lakefront. For a complete schedule or additional information, visit [www.lakefrontfestival.com](http://www.lakefrontfestival.com) or call 410-715-3161.

**Lakefront Lunchtime Concerts at Lake Kittamaqundi**

Get out of the office and enjoy lunch on the banks of beautiful Lake Kittamaqundi at Columbia Town Center. Each event features live music, free cold beverages, coupons for local eateries and more. Concerts occur weekly on Wednesdays, May through July. For an entertainment schedule or additional information, visit [www.ColumbiaAssociation.org](http://www.ColumbiaAssociation.org) or call 410-730-1801.

**Sheep & Wool Festival**

This unique festival has been held at the Howard County Fairgrounds on the first full weekend in May for more than 35 years. It has grown to be the largest festival in Howard County, and features working sheepdogs, weaving and shearing, delicious lamb dishes and a large array of wool crafts. For additional information, visit [www.sheepandwool.org](http://www.sheepandwool.org) or call 410-531-3647.

**Sunset Serenades at Centennial Park**

Bring a blanket and picnic dinner and enjoy an evening performance in scenic Centennial Park in Ellicott City. Modestly priced concession menu items are also available. Concerts occur weekly over the summer months. Parking donations are appreciated but not required. For a schedule of events or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/) or call 410-313-4700.

### **Travelin' Bands Summer Time Concert Series**

Grab a blanket, bring the family and enjoy the sounds of summer and free ice cream. Events are presented by the Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks and sponsored by Edy's Grand Ice Cream. Parking donations are appreciated; locations and dates vary. For a schedule of events or additional information, visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/rap/) or call 410-313-4700.

### **Parks & Open Space**

#### **Brighton Dam Azalea Garden**

While technically not in Howard County, Montgomery County's Brighton Dam Azalea Garden is just a few hundred yards across the Patuxent River. The garden is easily accessed from the Triadelphia Reservoir west of Clarksville and greets visitors each spring with 22,000 blooms. For more information, call 301-774-9124 or visit [www.wssc.dst.md.us](http://www.wssc.dst.md.us).

#### **Columbia Association's Columbia Archives Lakefront Walking Tours**

All you need is your feet and the Columbia Association's Lakefront Walking Tour brochure to discover fascinating facts and folklore about the public art, architecture and design of Columbia's core. Also see connections between Jim Rouse, the goals he set for Columbia and the public art that expresses that vision. Pick up or have a copy sent to you by contacting Columbia Archives at [Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com](mailto:Columbia.Archives@ColumbiaAssociation.com) or visit Howard County Tourism at [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com).

#### **Columbia Association Parks & Pathways**

The Columbia Association maintains more than 3,500 acres of open space, including 268 footbridges, 170 tot lots, the 40-acre Symphony Woods, 40 ponds and lakes, and natural open space areas, interlaced by more than 93.5 miles of pathways for walking, biking and jogging. Additional features include picnic areas and fitness trails. Get a complete map of Howard County's Pathways for a small fee at the Columbia Association's Welcome Center in Town Center or for free at the Howard County Visitor Information Center in Historical Ellicott City, [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com).

#### **Regional, Community and Neighborhood Parks**

Howard County Department of Recreation and Park's numerous regional and community parks feature accessible playgrounds; recreation areas for picnics; scenic trails for hiking, exploring and fitness; ponds and lakes; adventure activities; historical and cultural sites; and more. Amenities vary; for additional information visit [www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/RAP](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/RAP/RAP) or call 410-313-4700.

Okay, that's 51 ways to enjoy Howard County's diverse range of things to see and do without spending a dime. Now, the only thing missing is what to do with all that extra cash. One need not worry; free activities can surely work up an appetite that can be easily satisfied at one of Howard County's many delightful dining choices. It is also entirely possible that a full day's activity will require spa services and a relaxing overnight stay at a local bed-and-breakfast or full-service hotel. If that's not enough, take in a show at one of many indoor and outdoor venues, and throw in some shopping at one of Howard County's popular shopping destinations. For more information visit, [www.visithowardcounty.com](http://www.visithowardcounty.com)

